

Prof. Jastrow Criticises a "History of Zionism"

By MORRIS JASTROW, Jr.

Author of "Zionism and the Future of Palestine."

ZIONISM is a topic of present day interest. The movement is of interest to Jews and Christians alike; and Mr. Sokolow's work, of which the first volume has been issued, is therefore a timely one. Those, however, who take up this portly volume of over 300 pages in the hope of getting a "History of Zionism" will be disappointed, whereas those who wish to read a fairly well written propagandist work, setting forth the claims and aspirations of the particular brand of Zionism to which the author is attached, will have their expectations fully realized.

Mr. Sokolow has written a big book, but not a good one. He has with great industry compiled a vast mass of facts, most of which do not bear on Zionism proper, but which are brought forward to create the impression that modern Zionism is the culmination of a movement extending over centuries. The book fairly teems with this spirit. It is full of propaganda pleas and propaganda arguments and propaganda interpretations of events that in reality have nothing to do with Zionism.

The propaganda begins with the insertion of an introduction by the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, evidently requested by the author with a view of securing wider attention to his work, but in which Mr. Balfour is curiously non-committal on the crucial point, whether he favors the reorganization of Palestine as a Jewish state. Even more non-committal is a letter from Lord Bryce to the author, in which he contents himself with some general observations on the interesting history of the Jews and on the possibilities of Zionism. The one important statement in Lord Bryce's letter is the expression of his opinion that attachment to the Zionist cause will not affect the loyalty of Jews to the countries in which they dwell. Yet such is the zeal of Zionists "encompassing land and sea" for converts that on the basis of non-committal statements which happen to be embedded in a work on Zionism, Lord Bryce and Mr. Balfour will probably be claimed as Zionists.

II.

The author himself contributes a lengthy introduction in which he sets forth his views on Zionism, and it may be said with due recognition of his earnestness and enthusiasm that the fifty-three chapters into which he divides his first volume are merely a commentary to the introduction with illustrations of his theme drawn from events in the history of the Jews during the past three centuries. It may be that in the second volume he will get down to a "History of Zionism," but certainly in the first one there is little to suggest a historical treatment of his theme—hardly even a logical treatment. He might at least have arranged his loosely connected chapters in a chronological order instead of moving forward and backward like a weaver's shuttle.

Everything that comes to Mr. Sokolow's mill is grist for him to be ground up into Zionist propaganda. Because a distinguished Amsterdam Rabbi, Manasseh ben Israel, through whose efforts the Jews were admitted into England under Cromwell's regime, believed as every one did in the seventeenth century in the orthodox doctrine of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, several chapters are devoted to an analysis of Manasseh's writings to prove what nobody denies.

But what has the restoration of the Jews to England to do with the modern Zionist movement? Still less obvious is the connection between Zionism and the influence exerted by the Bible upon English literature (which surely did not require demonstration) and Zionism. Yet the first two chapters are devoted to this

theme. Because Lord Byron wrote some beautiful poems based on Biblical themes and models, a chapter is devoted to him, apparently with the intent to suggest that he too was a Zionist. Because Lord Beaconsfield in his novels touches upon Jewish themes and the aspirations of Jewish dreamers, he becomes a link in the chain which the author forges to show that modern Zionism represents the terminus of a process extending over centuries.

Six chapters are devoted to Napoleon's relations to Palestine and the Jews, but except for the fact—which is not new—that Napoleon was actuated by the current belief in a restoration of the Jewish nation in his Palestinian campaign, there is not the slightest bearing of these chapters on modern Zionism, which is the only aspect of the theme of interest to the world. Again, three chapters are devoted to the late Baron de Hirsch and his munificent philanthropic efforts to rescue Russian Jews from the thralldom under which they were living by establishing Jewish colonies in Argentina, but surely all this has nothing to do with Zionism, particularly as the author is forced to admit (page 252) that the Baron was not a Zionist.

The propaganda is carried out in most subtle fashion. The author has filled his work with some seventy portraits of distinguished men from the seventeenth century to our own days—Hugo Grotius, Joseph Priestley, President John Adams, Beaconsfield, Joseph Salvador, Lord Kitchener, Edward Robinson, Baron de Hirsch, Sir Moses Montefiore—to mention only a few in this promiscuous group; and naturally, finding these in a "History of Zionism" one concludes that these men were Zionists or had something to do with Zionism, but Robinson and Kitchener are merely introduced because they conducted archaeological work in Palestine, and Hugo Grotius because he was the friend of a scholar who wrote a book on the "Restoration of the Jews" to Palestine. The chapter on Sir Moses Montefiore, who devoted his life to philanthropic undertakings, would be in place in a history of the Jews or in a history of Palestine, but the mere fact that as an orthodox Jew he naturally believed in the restoration dogma does not warrant Mr. Sokolow in including a sketch of Montefiore's life and deeds in a history of Zionism.

In view of the fact that really orthodox Jews are not, with the exception of a small minority, at present affiliated with modern Zionism, which is distinctly political rather than religious, it is quite possible that Sir Moses if he were living might have joined the "League of British Jews," organized since the outbreak of the war to protest against the political aim of the Zionists to convert Palestine into a Jewish state. Montefiore believed in a religious and not in a political restoration.

III.

Mr. Sokolow is either so subtle as to defeat the very end he has in view or he is laboring under a strange delusion that every utterance of an English, French or American writer—litterateur, clergyman or statesman, bearing on the Jews, or on the Bible or on the Hebrew language, forms part and parcel of a history of Zionism. He carefully excludes German testimony of this character or he might have swelled his book to a thousand pages. Of the fifty-three chapters in the book there are about twelve that belong to a "History of Zionism." The balance, forming three-fourths of the volume, have either the loosest kind of connection with the theme or none at all. It would have been in order if Mr. Sokolow had summarized in one or two chapters earlier movements that might be regarded as forerunners of modern Zionism, but to devote chapter after chapter to such themes as "England and the Bible," "The Hebrew

Language," "The Palmerston Period," "The Earl of Shaftesbury," "The Crimean War," "British Interest and Work in Palestine," "The Lebanon Question," &c., in addition to the irrelevant chapters already instanced, is merely calculated to obscure the issue involved in the modern Zionist movement.

The fact is, as clearly set forth in an earlier work on "Zionism," by Prof. Richard Gottheil of Columbia University (1914), which is a genuine history of the movement, that an entirely new turn to Zionist aspirations in the past was given by the appearance in 1896 of a monograph of the late Dr. Theodor Herzl under the title of *The Jewish State*. In that monograph Dr. Herzl proposed as the solution of what he called "The Jewish Problem" the reorganization of the Jews as a national and political unit with a visible political centre. Through the influence of Dr. Herzl, a man of magnetic qualities and of extraordinary energy, a Jewish congress was convened in Basel in 1897, and, Palestine having been selected as the visible political centre, the modern Zionist movement which is distinctly political in character was launched.

Political Zionism, of which Dr. Herzl thus became the founder, arose as a reaction against anti-semitism, which was rampant in various parts of Europe—chiefly in Germany, Austria and Russia—during the closing decades of the last century. Dr. Herzl interpreted the widespread prejudice against the Jews as due to the circumstance that they represent a separate nationality and that as such they form a foreign element in the countries in which they had settled. His conclusion, therefore, was that the Jews should recognize this fact and seek to become a genuine nationality by reorganizing themselves as a nation. While he realized that only a small proportion of Jews could ever become in the full sense part and parcel of such a nationality settled in some centre, yet the existence of a "Jewish State" would serve to keep alive the feeling of a nationalistic solidarity among Jews and that such a state could also exercise pressure through diplomatic channels to protect Jews in Russia, Poland and Rumania and elsewhere against acts of repression and cruel persecution.

IV.

The plan aroused widespread interest and the Zionist movement grew by leaps and bounds during the two decades following upon the Basel congress. It appealed to the romantic sentiment with which Palestine was invested for both Jews and Christians. It at first stirred the orthodox Jews to a feeling that the religious hopes to which they had clung for 2,000 years for a restoration of ancient Israel, with its priesthood and temple ritual including animal sacrifices, were about to be realized, but when it became evident that Herzl's "Jewish State" had little in common with the purely religious doctrine of orthodox Judaism, the orthodox element to a large extent withdrew. Those in control of political Zionism are not orthodox or even believing Jews.

The leader himself, Dr. Herzl, had thrown off all allegiance to the rites and ceremonies of the ancestral faith. Dr. Max Nordau, the distinguished litterateur and one of the leaders by the side of Dr. Herzl, is an agnostic (or is at least regarded as such) and the bulk of the followers were not religious Jews but claimed to be stirred by the nationalistic appeal of the movement. Many boasted that they had no particular sympathy with the Jewish religion. The leaders of the movement in this country are not what is ordinarily called observant Jews; and even those who are yet look upon political Zionism as a nationalistic rather than as a religious movement. The position taken by Dr. Herzl has been modified somewhat by the unfolding of the movement, but essentially the platform of modern Zionism remains as first formulated, having as its ultimate aim the establishment in Palestine of a political centre which shall be the restored national homeland of the Jews.

How in the face of this Mr. Sokolow can say in his introduction (p. xxv.) that it is "fallacious" to assume that Zionism aims at the creation of an independent Jewish State and that the "Jewish State" was never a part of the Zionist programme? It is hard to understand. Why then all this agitation of the Zionists for the past years to obtain political control of Palestine? Why the shout of triumph (when Mr. Balfour issued his declaration in November, 1917, that the British Gov-

ernment "views with favor the creation of a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine") that the aim of Zionism had been accomplished?

It is characteristic of the political Zionists, whom Mr. Sokolow represents to indulge in verbal quibbles. Because it has been shown that the creation of a "Jewish State" in Palestine would be an anachronism and besides in contradiction to the democratic basis of modern States which rejects any connection between Church and State—necessarily involved in a "Jewish State"—Zionists are now inclined to drop the term, while retaining the essence. But no matter what one may call it, political Zionism aims at the creation of a State that is to be distinctly Jewish. Otherwise political Zionism has no *raison d'être*. The movement stands or falls with this aim; and if the aim be abandoned then the colonization of Jews in Palestine becomes a mere economic measure and is no longer a nationalistic measure.

V.

Mr. Sokolow carefully conceals from the reader that political Zionism has encountered most serious opposition both from Jews and non-Jews. In England, in France and in this country many voices have been raised in protest and organizations formed, against the attempt to organize the Jews as a political unit, aye, in protest against the basis on which political Zionism rests, that the Jews represent a separate nationality. This is denied in no uncertain terms. The factor uniting Jews, as has been pointed out by non-Zionists and anti-Zionists, is a common religion and the possession of common traditions, born of common experiences, with the factor of tradition surviving after the religious bond is no longer felt. Political Zionism has been condemned as a misreading of the trend of the history of the Jews. The dangers and fallacies inherent in the attempt of political Zionism to unite Jews on the basis of a common nationality have been pointed out with the result that a strong current against the aims of political Zionism has set in which showed itself when the Zionists appeared before the Peace Conference in March of this year with their plea to reorganize Palestine as the national homeland of the Jews—if not now, at all events in the future.

It is in order to counteract this strong opposition that Mr. Sokolow has written his propagandist work, under the title of *History of Zionism*, which was to be impressive by its very bulk. In order to disarm criticism, he indulges in such verbal camouflage as his extraordinary statement that political Zionism does not aim at the creation of a Jewish State. His big book is intended also to conceal the significant fact that of Jews settled in Western Europe and in the United States, where Jews enjoy the same political privileges and duties as their fellow citizens and where they have become thoroughly assimilated to the conditions about them, not five per cent. want Palestine to be organized as a Jewish State. They do not believe in a "national homeland" for the Jews; they decline to become hyphenates, citizens of one land with affiliations toward another.

Many realize also the serious danger to the position of the Jews scattered throughout the world involved in this anachronistic endeavor to reunite them as a separate nationality, and have raised their voices in warning against the endeavor. It is recognized also to be a grave injustice to the Mohammedans and Christians constituting over 80 per cent. of the present population of Palestine to formulate a policy which involves wresting the political control of Palestine out of the hands of those who have been settled there for many centuries.

VI.

This opposition crystallized at the time of the presentation of the Zionists' claims before the Peace Conference and while no official announcement has as yet been made, enough has leaked out of the secret deliberations to make it quite certain that the conference will proceed cautiously in

Continued on Following Page.

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